

October 8, 2009

As influenza activity in Arizona continues to increase, the number of specimens sent to the Arizona State Lab (ASL) for influenza testing has increased. The Arizona State Lab will only be accepting influenza specimens for patients with influenza-like illness who are hospitalized or deceased. **The word “Hospitalized” or “Death” must appear on the lab submission form or the specimen will be rejected.** Due to testing capacity, we may not be able to test all specimens received at ASL and will be strictly enforcing this policy beginning Wednesday October 14th, 2009. Results of 2009 H1N1 influenza PCR tests conducted by ASL on hospitalized or deceased patients or patients from sentinel influenza sites will be mailed to the submitting agency by ASL.

Influenza testing at ASL is primarily for surveillance purposes.

- Treat patients based on clinical presentation without waiting for test results. Treatment initiated early is more likely to provide benefit.
- Positive tests for seasonal influenza can help guide treatment decisions. The sensitivity of some of these tests is suboptimal, so negative results should not be used to rule out H1N1 influenza.
- At this time, the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus accounts for most of the circulating influenza viruses so a positive influenza test most likely is due to this strain.
- Please refer to the 2009 H1N1 influenza Clinical Guidelines on our website under Healthcare Providers (www.azdhs.gov/flu) for additional information. This document will be updated throughout the response if the guidelines for testing at ASL change.
- We will continue to update influenza surveillance information at www.azdhs.gov/flu.

Several commercial laboratories now offer 2009 H1N1 influenza testing, including Focus Diagnostics (through Quest Diagnostics) and LabCorp. Other local laboratories in Arizona will be bringing on H1N1 influenza testing in the next several months. ASL is assisting laboratories to validate new 2009 H1N1 influenza tests and will continue to inform providers of additional laboratories as they are validated.

We appreciate your understanding as we face this unfolding pandemic.